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5 December 1968

NSC BRIEFING

VENETZUELA

- I. National elections will take place ^{tomorrow} 7 December. Presidential race expected to be close.
- A. Former junta president Admiral Larrazabal, nominated by Democratic Republican Union (URD), Venezuelan Commie Party (PCV), and another minor party, is favored.
- B. But Romulo Betancourt, chief of Democratic Action (AD), the largest party, appears improving his chances of victory, and Rafael Caldera, chief of Christian Democratic Party, also a strong contender.
- II. Larrazabal's acceptance of Commie support has probably enhanced prestige of Communist Party.
- A. Commies in better position penetrate or influence government and push for Bloc relations if Larrazabal wins and estimated Commie vote (five to eight percent of about 2,500,000 voters) is decisive.
1. Larrazabal has denied deal with Commies.
2. Major parties state they oppose Commies in future coalition, but they also indicate they would consider renewal relations one or more Bloc countries.
- B. Communists may now win more national and local legislative seats.

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Approved For Release 2002/08/12 : CIA-RDP79R00890A001000080024-2

III. Military coup more likely after elections than before and could take place if serious inter-party strife develops in new coalition government.

A. Top military have expressed non-political role and their intent to safeguard elections.

1. Larrazabal or Caldera victory not likely to provoke immediate coup, but Betancourt victory reportedly might do so because traditional military hostility to Democrat Action Party and Betancourt.

B. Provocative action against the military by radical civilian groups, some of whom possess arms, or widespread violence during elections could lead to military intervention.